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COUNTRY NOTE**

Venezuela

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country note for Venezuela for a programme of cooperation for the period 1998 to 2002.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Venezuela has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and is committed to their implementation. The goals of the World Summit for Children were included in the 1991 national plan of action (NPA). In the IX National Plan (1994), the State's objectives are macroeconomic stabilization; equitable and sustainable social development; reactivation and restructuring of the productive system; increased competitiveness; and replacement of the culture of dependence on the State by a culture of rights that encourages social participation and guarantees opportunity for all.

2. Despite those positive initiatives, however, Venezuela has entered a period of economic crisis because of falling oil revenues. As a result, poverty has increased and income disparities have widened, adversely affecting the situation of children and women, especially in marginal urban areas and among

* E/ICEF/1997/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1997.

indigenous populations. Its 1995 gross national product was lower than in 1980, and inflation could reach 95 per cent in 1996. The unemployment rate of 11 per cent is one of the highest in the region. Debt service represents 32 per cent of the national budget and approximately 20 per cent of exports.

3. Deficiencies in civil registration impede access to education and health for certain population groups. In education, a 78 per cent retention rate to grade 5 and a 19 per cent secondary school enrolment in 1993-1994 are low in relation to the country's development level. In the last 10 years, 3.2 million children have dropped out of school.

4. The maternal mortality ratio increased from 56 per 100,000 live births in 1988 to 68 in 1994. In 1994, both the infant mortality rate (25 per 1,000 live births) and the under-five mortality rate (30 per 1,000 live births) were higher than in 1993. There are problems in sustaining immunization efforts. New strategies are required in the prevention and treatment of acute respiratory infections and diarrhoeal diseases. The expansion of safe water coverage has failed to keep pace with increased requirements. Deficiencies in environmental sanitation systems pose risks to health and degrade natural resources.

5. Venezuela leads the region in the fortification of common foods to combat anaemia and vitamin A deficiencies and is making progress towards the elimination of iodine deficiency disorders.

6. Violence in the family, community and society is on the rise, and crimes against the individual are perceived as a national problem. In 1993, some 2,000 children and adolescents died from violent causes and another 7,900 suffered personal injuries.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

7. Both the Government and civil society recognize that investment in children should to be accorded the highest political priority, but the transformation of this consensus into effective and efficient national action has yet to materialize fully. The challenge is to accelerate national social investment reforms so that there is a more efficient use of resources for child survival, development and protection. The focus of the current two-year bridging programme on targeted advocacy and technical assistance has yielded some improvements in social investment to benefit children.

8. Strategic alliances with business and academic sectors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others have generated broad public support for mobilization in favour of adapting national legislation so that it conforms to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Funds from the Special Adjustment Facility for Latin America and the Caribbean have been used for this purpose.

9. The national mid-decade NPA review concluded that unless children's concerns are integrated into macrolevel reforms, there will be no sustainable achievement even in programmes such as immunization. The review also identified the need to (a) improve the links between compensatory measures and medium- and long-term public policies; (b) strengthen capacities for situation analysis, monitoring and evaluation; (c) decentralize planning; (d) improve the link

between programmes and budgets; (e) strengthen technical and management capacity; (f) reduce the frequent changes of counterparts; and (g) expand systems of information to orient national and local decision-making.

10. The UNICEF-assisted subregional Andean and Amazon programmes have generated considerable interest and ideas for the design of new policies and strategic directions in the Government's national action plan for integrated service delivery.

11. Recent fund-raising activities benefiting UNICEF-assisted programmes have shown that both private and public sector enterprises are interested in supporting programmes for children.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

12. The IX National Development Plan aims to address children's needs through (a) the promotion of human rights, especially those aimed at strengthening the family, with the child as the development priority; (b) the creation of opportunities and conditions for the full development potential of children and adolescents through access to health care and education, and the enjoyment of essential rights; (c) the reduction of geographic disparities and inequities based on ethnicity and gender; and (d) support to the modernization process, the building of institutional and organizational capacity, and social participation. In this context, the Government of Venezuela-UNICEF programme of cooperation aims to use advocacy, in support of the National Development Plan, to (a) expand the coverage of vulnerable groups in basic programmes; (b) develop targeting mechanisms to reach the poor and marginalized; and (c) mobilize all sectors of society, including children, adolescents and women.

13. Children and public policy. UNICEF will support the Government and NGOs to undertake research and analysis, with a focus on human rights issues such as gender. Research will stress the promotion of social justice and provide for the formulation of public policies based on cost-effective and sustainable choices for the provision of social services. UNICEF will also provide technical assistance in the following areas: policy development; follow-up to the World Summit goals; and monitoring of programme processes and results. This will comprise facilitating the adaptation of national legislation to the stipulations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, institutional modernization and capacity-building, and advocacy to improve budget allocations for the social sectors and the participation of children and youth. UNICEF will support improvements related to training and institutional strengthening; the development of an integrated system of indicators, statistics and information; social budget management; and the development of evaluation methodologies.

14. Local development. The objective is to contribute to basic services delivery through the strengthening of management capacities of community organizations and social management practices by utilizing positive experiences and demonstration projects. UNICEF will support the use of techniques to introduce intersectoral implementation of primary health care activities, including immunization, sanitation, food and nutrition security, safe water, education, community organization and participation. Service coverage in those areas will provide feedback to national sectoral programmes in order to ensure national achievement of goals. A group of communities in poor rural and urban

areas, including Metropolitan Caracas and Andean and Amazonian states, will continue to be a priority. A national movement of local institutions and Mayors as Defenders of Children will be developed to promote the organization and mobilization of children and adolescents; the integration of curricula on child rights into social management courses for local mayors; the development of appropriate materials; and the establishment of an integrated system of information and methodologies to evaluate programmes for children, including the identification and dissemination of successful experiences nationwide.

15. Communication and social mobilization. The proposed country programme aims to mobilize public opinion, NGOs, churches and the private sector and to empower families around child development and protection, and to promote the notion of co-sharing of responsibility and co-financing. Activities will emphasize the systematization of national and local knowledge as well as increased access to scientific and technological know-how in the area of family, children and women. Discussions on child rights issues will be encouraged through seminars and other forums for public officials and national leaders.

16. Programme support. The country office will need to improve its technical capacity in the areas of social policy development, communication support and improved resource mobilization through local fund-raising and advocacy in support of national priorities.

17. Coordination with other agencies. There will be close cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme in public policy development; with the Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in health and education reform, respectively, and in training for communities and families; with the United Nations Development Fund for Women on adapting legislation to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; with the International Labour Organisation on the development of policies concerning child labour; with the World Bank on providing assistance to state reform and programmes for poor urban areas; with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on improving food security; and with the Inter-American Development Bank on expanding co-financing of projects.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme cooperation, 1998-2002 a/
(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	Supplementary funds	Total
Children and public policy	1 750	1 080	2 830
Local development	800	2 835	3 635
Communication and social mobilization	1 700	1 085	2 785
Total	4 250	5 000	9 250

a/ These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.